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Development Education
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EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND THE SEARCH FOR HUMAN LIBERATION

by

Robin Burns

UNICEF's interest in development education reflects its long-term vision that through education today's children may create and participate in a world that enjoys an increase in true international understanding, mutual respect and congeniality, and a willingness to co-operate in meeting each other's needs. At present, the term "development education" has become a catchword for a wide range of all possible interpretations and activities.

In its policy document, the UNICEF approach to development education, focussing primarily on children up to the age of 15, in formal, non-formal and informal educational situations in developed countries, is outlined.[1/] UNICEF has been involved in the discussions, and now leadership, of development education at the international UN agency and NGO levels, and has produced material for use in schools through co-operation with field officers in

Information
Division
UNICEF
United Nations
New York
Tel: 754-1234
Cables:
UNICEF-New York
Telex: 127895

Service de
l'Information
UNICEF
Palais des Nations
1211 Genève
Tél: (022) 34 60 11
Télégrammes:
UNICEF-Genève
Télex: 27 908

1/ "Development Education: a major information activity", UNICEF Policy Paper.

developing countries and through national committee initiatives in some developed countries, most notably Sweden, the Netherlands and Canada. Perhaps most interesting is the World Card game, which attempts to introduce the concept of human social diversity and depicts common life situations in both developed and developing countries.

Talking with you today about development education, especially in the context of UNICEF's increasing interest in its promotion, I would like to focus on three main questions:

- how has development education come into being?
- why is it important?
- what are some of the prospects and problems for furthering the work?

I. How has development education come into being?

Development education is a term which first appeared around 1970, being used by people working predominantly in international fund-raising development assistance agencies. It needs to be seen in the light of development thinking generally at that time, especially the disappointment at the failure of the first UNDD[2/] to make any significant impact on either the development of the least developed countries in particular, or the international transfer of development resources.

Most development assistance agencies have always included some form of educational outreach as part of their task. This may have been - and in some cases still is today publicity and information in the public media, and even for schools, to arouse interest in their work in particular, to

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2/ United Nations Development Decade

engage public sympathy and support for fund-raising. Many debates have been held concerning the effects of such information. These have ranged from the consideration of short-lived appeal to the conscience of people in rich countries that the much-used "starving child" image has created, to the effects on the public at large in developed countries of being constantly presented with overwhelming problem situations of poverty, disease and corruption in countries "out there", to which the expected response is to provide funds out of our benevolence in order to attempt to rescue the individual child and its family, village or disaster situation.

A mood of criticism developed out of this situation. Some of the main dimensions of this criticism include:

1. The effects on both donor and recipient alike of money guiltily given to a door-knock appeal or dramatically-presented disaster-situation, where the response is to suddenly-aroused emotions, with little previous knowledge of the situation; when media stories of corruption, mal-administration of aid and so on are coupled with this "special effort" approach, the outcome is often scepticism, renewed appeals to donors' sense of charity, and attempts to "prove" the honesty and effectiveness of the particular agency's work. At the recipient end, the label "Australian X Foundation" on a sack of rice is unlikely, even if it can be read, to have any effect on the starving individual other than to reinforce feelings of hopelessness and dependence on others to provide for yet one more day's survival in a world outside his/her comprehension and generally hostile to such insignificant mendicants.

2. Concern that, as the electronic media has made spaceship earth a reality, at least in terms of the simultaneous presentation of information, the public has become over-exposed to the newsworthy selection of events as they happen around the world. To Mr. and Mrs. Average, seated comfortably around the telly and half-asleep after that unneeded extra helping of pudding, the horrors of napalm-victims, of the Sahel disaster or of statistics on world hunger are placed side-by-side with Elvis Presley's suicide and the latest suspected side-effects from excessive use of analgesics or over-eating. The latter is more readily comprehensible and assimilable into their lives, while repeated presentation of the former evokes a defensive reaction in terms of "things over which I have no control" and emotional blocking of any response whatsoever. Even now, we've focussed on "What goes wrong with aid", rather than follow-up success stories. My Swedish colleague Stig Lindholm showed in the early 1970s that the general knowledge of the Swedish population about developing countries was quite low, especially details of day-to-day aspects as opposed to dramatic events, and that in order to mobilise people to take any action other than occasionally dipping into their purses to give to an appeal, it is necessary for them to see some connections between their own lives and interests and those on whose behalf they are being exhorted to be concerned. Similar situations have been found in other developed countries, and while there is still a sympathetic body of opinion concerning the need to help others less fortunate than ourselves, this is based on an increasingly critical approach to the "bottomless pit" that aid has begun to seem, and on an increasing reluctance, as awareness increases of problems and disadvantaged groups and of rising inflation and unemployment in developed countries, to support appeals for people in other countries.

3. The whole notion of "us" going to solve "their problems" has come into question. New approaches to the nature of development have come from various sources. These include the reflections of development workers on their experiences; the rising impatience and frustration felt in many quarters in developing countries where aid has often been found to bring political and economic strings which increase dependence on the developed countries, especially in the absence of significant breakthroughs in the field of international trade, and where development along the lines of the industrialised countries is seen not only to have harmful side-effects such as pollution and structural unemployment but to bring-about social and cultural disruption in the developing countries with major benefits only to those already in an advantaged position in them, and to the experiences of developed countries in the mid-seventies which have led many to question the desirability of continued technological and industrial (capitalist) development, or overdevelopment, as it has been called.

From the realisation of the power of the multi-national corporations and their methods of operation in low-wage countries to the calls for national self-reliance and alternative paths to development for countries with widely different historical and cultural backgrounds, thinking about <u>development</u> is in ferment. Traditional methods of obtaining and administering aid, especially on a bilateral basis, has been seen in many cases to benefit the donor more than the recipient and has been labelled "the development of underdevelopment". The calls for a new international economic order and a basic human needs approach to development emphasise both the desirability of promoting development through fair trade, and developing

whole populations and not just those capable of benefitting from western technology and some capital and technical assistance. Some groups have gone further and called for a new international order as such, emphasising such concepts as the interdependence of all nations and peoples for the solution of problems which are global, not just located in the developing countries, and often specifically caused by actions and policies in the developed countries, which affect all our futures, as well as a concern for justice in the world in and between nations, which goes beyond economic consideration to basic notions of human rights and dignity, and demands an approach to development which starts with man as a human being and looks at the barriers to achieving full human potential as the urgent developmental task.

4. Arising out of all this, education has come to the forefront in important aspects of development thinking. Beginning with the dissatisfaction of some agencies that their publicity campaigns did little to change basic attitudes, and that a longer-term orientation both to the realities of the developing countries and the inter-relationships between socio-political and economic processes in and between groups, developed and developing, was urgently needed, a movement began to emerge. A major step was taken in 1970 when the AD[3/]-section of FAO held a consultation on "Development Education: the schools open to the Third World", and the aims of Development Education were defined as preparation of today's children to understand and take part in the development process; otherwise they as individuals will be as badly deprived as society in general. In the first instance, agencies have seen their task in terms of their own membership: increasing levels of understanding of critical aspects

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3/ Action for Development

of the development task, broadening the base of activities beyond fund-raising to influencing governmental policies and official aid programmes and creating an aware public opinion so that aid and development are not simply acknowledged as a budgetary item of low priority and subject to fluctuation depending on the state of the nation's finances. A recent Australian study has shown the magnitude of the task, for even the active members of agencies regard at least the provision of funds for educational programmes as of low priority, especially when accompanied by political activity.

However, thanks largely to the work of Brazilian Paulo Freire, a framework and a method of approach has been articulated which has come to be called conscientisation. It means, essentially, being with people, listening to them and assisting them to articulate their needs, fears, hopes and aspirations. A process of reflection on a situation, of clarification and of planning for action is set in motion, not to tell people, be they Third World peasants, school children or ethnic minority groups, what is wrong and what they can and should do about it, but to enable people to come to grips with the reality of their situation to think beyond the immediate situation to other possibilities, and to work out ways to become active participants in their future. Seen in this way, Development Education is both concerned with fundamental human situations, with man as an individual with potential to be realised, and who, together with others, can act to remove blocks to this realisation, and with an approach to people which does not present predetermined solutions which have to be "sold" to them, but starts in them an action-reflection spiral which enables them to grasp knowledge for themselves and to attempt to implement their own solutions based on this insight.

There are many other approaches which have been labelled Development Education or some similar term. UNESCO, for example, has for over 20 years promoted the concept of education for international understanding and peace, a very worthy concept. Others have emphasised intercultural understanding as the most important concept to be promulgated. A variety of methods have also been used, from the preparation of informational materials to be sold to teachers, to workshops, games and other devices which attempt to recognise that learning, especially learning and changing attitudes, is more than the presentation of factual material, for we know that attitudes involve the intellect, the emotions, and the capacity or tendency for action.

II. Why Development Education?

It is my firm conviction that all these approaches have important points to make about the most urgent needs in the world today and the way to make people, from children in schools to the public at large, aware of them. However, it is also my firm conviction that they are only partial approaches. I learnt at school that there was a vague notion of human diversity. It was coupled with studies of "children around the world" which firmly planted in my mind the notion that all Indians were poor but religious, the Chinese were hardworking and typically lived on sampans on the River Wang-Ho, the Samoans lived a lazy, happy life in round grass huts surrounded by coconut trees. The knowledge imparted in many schools and educational programmes today may be more sophisticated, but still tend to reinforce "us-them" distinctions and develop simplistic stereotypes. In present-day Australia, children tend to learn either about Asia, or about ethnic groups and their origins in Europe, depending on the district

and type of school they attend. They spend at least as much of their lives watching television, where neither Asians nor Anglo-Saxon immigrant Australians are consistently or informatively presented. Once a unit has been completed or a project or examination passed, the subject is considered to have been "done", and woe betide the teacher, in a later year or another subject area, who tries to revive the topic. "We did that with X or in Form Y!" is the frequent response. Even attempts to celebrate such things as UN day, or India or Italy week, tend to come as optional extras, as once-only special events with, in the words of T.S. Eliot, "no before or after".

And again, looking at the way information is presented at all, it is so often told by the teacher, the topic having been decided on by the teacher or group leader, to be absorbed, even if some fun activities take place, by the basically passive learners. Research indicates that the main message which gets through from such presentations, is that knowledge is divided into bits, with little or no connection between them, arbitrarily handed out to be re-gurgitated or stored for some unspecified future purpose. Further, the world is seen as divided into experts who know, and who choose what they will divulge to the uninitiated, who are grateful or indifferent to what is handed down to them and whose lives, concerns and futures are basically untouched by the process apart from immediate rewards and punishments handed out.

Is this what we really want to happen to knowledge about such vital issues as international relations, prejudice, poverty, justice and the global future?

Why does it happen in this way? From the point of view of some teachers at least, the problems of doing anything else are multitudinous:

" We are extremely busy, drained of nervous energy most of the time, continually pressurised by the pupils and anxious also to conform as much as we can with the requirements of the school hierarchy, the parents, the exam system, even the local press. We have enough pressure and wear and tear as it is, without taking on board a whole series more."

"I feel that this book does not do sufficient to acknowledge the highly controversial nature of the issues it explores. This controversial character surely raises crucial issues of principle - and of immediate practicality - about the teacher's commitment/neutrality, about the authority of the teacher, and about the teacher's responsibility to the opinions (including the 'prejudices') of children, parents, tribe or nation...even in countries where (this book) can be used in principle teachers will in practice face extremely complex problems with regard to their own stance. I don't see any easy answer to these questions."

"To introduce development education in teaching means a change in procedure and in method...Many teachers, while experimenting with new teaching methods, are not sufficiently trained and informed to deal with problems of development. There also are many who hide behind pedagogy because of refusal or fear of introducing controversial problems or of "politicizing" the school ... it is not only the lack of training but also of agreement, corporatism, and conservatism

> on the part of teachers that constitute major obstacles to development education ... the most innovative experiments in the field of development education (and in all other fields of education) have a chance of succeeding only with teachers' participation and interest. It seems to us that one can not discuss development education in the school without first discussing development education on the level of the teacher."

And when we look at adults, at those who after all have not only a determining role in the upbringing of children but in social decision-making - or passive acceptance of other's decisions - we see the results of such formal education and the many barriers to changing outlooks, habits and modes of thinking and feeling. Exhortation may lead to short-term reactions, information can be accepted or rejected but will most likely be ignored if it is not presented in a way which touches the individual's life or is capable of making sense to him or her, and even good experiences in communication and sharing may be short-lived after the event and often exhilarating support-situation of a conference or course fades into the everyday, workaday world.

It is for all these sorts of reasons that I believe that we can not escape the conclusion that knowledge is political, both in terms of the effects which the differential distribution of knowledge has in determining most of the future life-chances of the individual, and in terms of its relationship to action. New knowledge can be fascinating, and hoarded by its discoverers, or handed out in pieces to the unknowing OR it can be an ongoing approach to life, which leads to insights which can be translated into action, which is reflected on,

changes approaches and involves people in taking their own and their world's future into their hands. This is what development education must surely mean: not something fitted on to or seen as a nice optional extra to existing programmes and methods of learning, but an active process where teacher-learner distinctions become blurred in the joint process of discovery of self and others in an ongoing, critical and truly human act of being. Not only what we learn, but the way in which we learn is critical, and it is not something to be squeezed into our programmes and syllabuses, but a fundamental part of the learning process itself.

III. What to do about it?

To many, the hugeness and open-endedness of such an approach is threatening and even overwhelming. How can we, as interested agency members, teachers, concerned individuals do anything to put such ideas into practice? I would suggest that whenever two people are together, sharing common concerns in mutual respect of each other, and deciding to do something about their concerns, conscientisation is taking place. Where and how does it start? Again, by a willingness to share, to question our assumptions, to listen and to be critical in our reflections.

As an organisation, there are practical ways in which this approach can be applied to our work. The task is urgent, and the tendency to want to rush straight out and involve others in our concerns is tempting; so much so that we forget to listen, we fail to recognise the efforts that others are making because we are so sure that our way is more important, more right. I can not

tell you what you should do. What needs do you perceive to take your message to others? Whom do you want to reach? Have you listened to teachers, parents, publishers, children? Have you tried to clarify someone else's fumbling hopes, needs, confusions, to suggest new ways of working at an issue, to put your resources side-by-side with others to work for common goals? The first step is to clarify for yourselves what your situation is, your awareness of development, its meaning and action implications, and to be convinced that education in its broadest sense of leading out of, to something new, is a fundamental need here in Australia to further the work of development, liberation and justice. There are others to work with, to involve in the task, and reaching them, having the courage to examine our preconceptions, to find out and reflect on our own and others' reality, is the way along the path to a more just and more humane world. In this search, we can view education as a tool. As Freire sees it:

> "There is no such thing as a <u>neutral</u> educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, <u>or</u> it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

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ROBIN BURNS is Lecturer in Comparative Education at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. She gave this speech at a UNICEF conference held in Australia in connection with the International Year of the Child. Ms. Burns has been involved with non-governmental organisations such as World University Service since the early 1960s and has moved with them towards a concern for the way in which educational practices in the industrialised countries can create a better understanding of, and more favourable attitude towards, relationships with developing countries. In 1974, Robin Burns undertook a survey for FAO/Action for Development, entitled Higher Education and Third World Development Issues: an International Comparative Study, and has just completed a doctoral dissertation on The Formation and Legitimation of Development Education with particular reference to Australia and Sweden.